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AUTHOR	Street, Paul; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Seniors of 4 Eastern Kentucky high schools (166 boys; 149 girls) were administered semantic differential scales by which they rated first themselves, then their schools. The form used listed 9 pairs of terms, each representing a polarity scaled in 7 intervals. Results inferred that the student who had a high regard for himself also had a high regard for his school. The boys tended to regard the school less highly than themselves. Although girls did not do so at an acceptable level of confidence, their means scores also favored themselves. Both sexes scored themselves above their schools on separate items of scale. A lack of comparable data, though, left some questions unanswered, such as what the students should have scored as a "healthy" estimate of one's self and school. (KM)

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HOW EASTERN KENTUCKY HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS VIEW THEMSELVES VIS-A-VIS THEIR SCHOOLS

A report by the Bureau of School Service, College of Education, University of Kentucky,
February 1972

Seniors of four high schools, one of an independent district and three of a county district, were administered semantic differential scales by which they were asked to rate first themselves, then their schools. The results, both in total scores as indices of general attitude and in responses to individual items, imply some generalizations about how Appalachian youngsters view their schools.

The semantic differential, in the form used, listed nine pairs of terms each of which represents a polarity scaled in seven intervals. (The scale used was based on the work reported in The Measurement of Meaning, by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, published in 1957 by the University of Illinois Press.) While this scale asks the subject to rate himself (or the school as the case may be) with "1" as the highest on the "better" end of the polarity, and "7" as the lowest rating, the scale was reversed for purposes of scoring in this study so that the larger the score the "better" the rating.

With 166 senior boys in the sample, correlations between total scores on attitude toward self compared to total scores on attitude toward school were significant at the $<.05$ level with an r of .32.* For 149 girls the r was .40 and at a $<.05$ level. Combined, the boys and girls expressed a correlation of .36 between their attitudes

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*Tests for levels of confidence were two-tailed on the assumption that differences could be either way, the $\leq .05$ level being taken as acceptable.

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toward self and school. The boys viewed themselves as "better" than they did their school, and significantly so ($p = .01$). The girls also saw themselves as "better," but the difference in the mean scores could have been accidental--that is, was not statistically significant.

INFERENCES: The student who has high regard for himself tends also to have high regard for his school. The student who has low regard for himself tends also to have low regard for his school. The boys tend, however, to regard the school less highly than they do themselves.

What Variations Appeared in Responses to Items on Which Views Were Correlated?

Somewhat paradoxically, the responses to separate items within the scale showed that, in a majority of instances, a clear correlation and a clear difference existed between the way the student viewed himself and the way he viewed his school.

This seeming contradiction exists in that while the student who viewed himself favorably tended also to view his school favorably (and vice versa)--as indicated by significant though generally low correlation figures--they have, also, generally rated the school significantly different--actually lower than they have themselves with a few exceptions. This is to say, while they tended to think more (or less) highly of their schools as they thought more (or less) highly of themselves, they tended to think more highly of themselves, with few exceptions.

The tables which follow exhibit the way these two tendencies operated. Note that in most instances the students rated themselves above their schools even when they tended to rate both themselves and

TABLE 1

HOW SENIOR BOYS IN FOUR APPALACHIAN HIGH SCHOOLS VIEWED THEMSELVES AND THEIR SCHOOLS

N = 166	Mean Score for Item* View of Self	Mean Score for Item* View of School	Correlation Between Views of Self and of School	Direction and Probability of Difference in View of Self and of School	
Useful/Useless	4.68 = $\bar{X}$ 1.15 = SD	4.72 = $\bar{X}$ 1.68 = SD	0.226*	1.00	+
Pleasant/Unpleasant	4.43 = $\bar{X}$ 1.32 = SD	3.73 = $\bar{X}$ 1.89 = SD	0.047	0.00**	-
Beneficial/Harmful	4.31 = $\bar{X}$ 1.25 = SD	4.77 = $\bar{X}$ 1.54 = SD	0.217**	0.01**	+
Good/Bad	4.31 = $\bar{X}$ 1.45 = SD	4.39 = $\bar{X}$ 1.62 = SD	0.241**	0.81	+
Interesting/Boring	4.08 = $\bar{X}$ 1.44 = SD	3.42 = $\bar{X}$ 2.14 = SD	0.168	0.00**	-
Fair/Unfair	4.70 = $\bar{X}$ 1.26 = SD	3.63 = $\bar{X}$ 2.05 = SD	0.098	0.00**	-
Easy/Difficult	4.25 = $\bar{X}$ 1.54 = SD	3.28 = $\bar{X}$ 2.07 = SD	0.171	0.00**	-
Rewarding/Unrewarding	4.12 = $\bar{X}$ 1.37 = SD	4.36 = $\bar{X}$ 1.83 = SD	0.261**	0.21	+
Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory	4.42 = $\bar{X}$ 1.42 = SD	4.13 = $\bar{X}$ 1.84 = SD	0.252**	0.11	-
Total Score***	48.27 = $\bar{X}$ 8.11 = SD	45.12 = $\bar{X}$ 12.52 = SD	0.319**	0.01**	-

*Scale is from 1 through 7 inclusive.
**Significant at accepted level, $\leq .05$ on a two-tailed test.
***Scale is from 9 through 63 inclusive.
+ = Favor school.
- = Favor self.

TABLE 2

HOW SENIOR GIRLS IN FOUR APPALACHIAN HIGH SCHOOLS VIEWED THEMSELVES AND THEIR SCHOOLS

N = 149	Mean Score for Item* View of Self	Mean Score for Item* View of School	Correlation Between Views of Self and of School	Direction and Probability of Difference in View of Self and of School	
Useful/Useless	4.53 = $\bar{X}$ 1.20 = SD	4.89 = $\bar{X}$ 1.43 = SD	0.330**	0.01**	+
Pleasant/Unpleasant	4.51 = $\bar{X}$ 1.26 + SD	3.91 = $\bar{X}$ 1.77 = SD	0.128	0.00**	-
Beneficial/Harmful	4.40 = $\bar{X}$ 1.19 = SD	4.91 = $\bar{X}$ 1.48 = SD	0.134	0.00**	+
Good/Bad	4.64 = $\bar{X}$ 1.29 = SD	4.30 = $\bar{X}$ 1.58 = SD	0.234**	0.04**	-
Interesting/Boring	4.17 = $\bar{X}$ 1.34 = SD	3.80 = $\bar{X}$ 1.85 = SD	0.199**	0.04**	-
Fair/Unfair	4.78 = $\bar{X}$ 1.14 = SD	3.58 = $\bar{X}$ 2.12 = SD	0.147	0.00**	-
Easy/Difficult	4.34 = $\bar{X}$ 1.53 = SD	3.68 = $\bar{X}$ 1.79 = SD	0.354**	0.00**	-
Rewarding/Unrewarding	4.06 = $\bar{X}$ 1.43 = SD	4.44 = $\bar{X}$ 1.69 = SD	0.197**	0.02**	+
Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory	4.53 = $\bar{X}$ 1.28 = SD	4.24 = $\bar{X}$ 1.75 = SD	0.251**	0.09	-
Total Score***	49.02 8.24	47.01 11.50	0.399**	0.08	-

*Scale is from 1 through 7 inclusive.
**Significant at accepted level, $<.05$ on a two-tailed test.
***Scale is from 9 through 63 inclusive.
+ = Favor school.
- = Favor self.

and their schools in the same directions. Note also, however, that in a few instances even when their judgments of themselves and of their schools ran in the same direction (were "correlated"), they did rate their schools significantly above themselves.

It is perhaps worth noting on what items correlations were not demonstrated. (See tables 1 and 2.) Neither the boys nor the girls demonstrated at significant levels views of themselves as being like their schools in being pleasant or fair. Tne boys, additionally, did not see themselves as like their schools in being interesting, or easy; the girls, in being beneficial.

Remembering that the general tendency was to rate self above school, two kinds of exceptions to that general tendency may be noted?

1) Rating of school above self but not at a significant level. (That is, the higher rating may have been "accidental.")
2) Rating the school higher and significantly so.

The instances of the first of these are noteworthy only because they represent failure to support the general tendency. The general tendency was not demonstrated in responses by the boys to these three items: Useful-Useless, Good-Bad, and Rewarding-Unrewarding. None of the responses by the girls placing school above self were in this first category.

Then, those rating the school higher, and at a significant level, represent clear contradictions to the general trend. For the boys, the item Beneficial-Harmful was the only one. The girls rated their schools above themselves, and significantly so, on three items:

Useful-Useless, Beneficial-Harmful, and Rewarding-Unrewarding.

SUMMARY: As previously explained, students tended to view themselves much as they viewed their schools. They tended on most items, however, to view themselves even more highly than they did their schools, though there were exceptions, as reported above. (It may be interesting, and perhaps provide some insight into the views of students, for the reader to note on which items students rated themselves above their schools, and vice versa.)

It should be noted, however, that some of the differences between ratings of self and school may have been "accidental." For instance, boys favored their schools over themselves on only one item, Beneficial-Harmful, by a figure that met the 95% probability ($p = \leq .05$) standard.

Though, according to the average scores, the girls rated themselves more highly than they did their schools, the difference was not significant. On three of the nine items they rated themselves significantly below their schools: Useful-Useless, Beneficial-Harmful, and Rewarding-Unrewarding.

Did Boys and Girls Differ in Their Views of Self or of School?

In only one item did boys and girls differ significantly (at $\leq .05$) in view of self, and in only one in view of school.

Girls viewed themselves as better than boys viewed themselves on the Good-Bad item, and significantly so. Also, they viewed their

schools as significantly better than boys viewed their schools on the Easy-Difficult item. On all other items, though in total girls rated both themselves and their schools higher than did boys, the differences were not significant at an acceptable probability level.

Attitudes by Schools

For purposes of this report, the four high schools involved are given labels respectively A, B, C, and D. Responses for all four are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3

MEANS OF SCORES ON ITEMS OF SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL BY FOUR GROUPS OF APPALACHIAN HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

	Mean Ratings, Sexes Combined by School							
	School A N=50		School B N=68		School C N=77		School D N=123	
	View/ Self	View/ School	View/ Self	View/ School	View/ Self	View/ School	View/ Self	View/ School
Useful/Useless	4.66	5.22	4.69	4.97	4.40	5.01	4.67	4.41
Pleasant/ Unpleasant	4.58	4.06	4.41	4.10	4.22	3.73	4.62	3.61
Beneficial/ Harmful	4.42	5.20	4.16	5.06	4.39	5.10	4.41	4.39
Good-Bad	4.50	4.60	4.62	4.69	4.19	4.52	4.55	3.95
Interesting/ Boring	4.08	3.62	4.34	4.10	3.91	3.61	4.15	3.31
Fair/Unfair	4.60	4.16	4.94	3.59	4.71	3.86	4.70	3.23
Easy-Difficult	4.10	3.30	4.29	3.54	4.04	3.71	4.53	3.35
Rewarding/ Unrewarding	4.24	4.54	4.25	4.68	3.86	4.48	4.09	4.14
Satisfactory/ Unsatisfactory	4.36	4.32	4.72	4.26	4.04	4.38	4.64	3.96

School A

Seniors of School A, 50 students of both sexes, expressed attitudes toward themselves and their school which correlated at acceptable levels of significance for 5 of the 9 items, favoring themselves over their schools in 3 of the 5 indicated:

1) Useful-Useless (favoring school over self)
2) Interesting-Boring (favoring self over school)
3) Fair-Unfair (favoring self over school)
4) Rewarding-Unrewarding (favoring school over self)
5) Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory (favoring self over school)

Those not correlating at a significant level were (with the direction of tendency suggested by difference in mean scores):

1) Pleasant-Unpleasant (favoring self over school)
2) Beneficial-Harmful (favoring school over self)
3) Good-Bad (favoring school over self)
4) Easy-Difficult (favoring school over self)

Since the sampling for some of the four schools was comparatively small, no test was made to determine whether or not differences in view were "accidental" or established at acceptable levels.

School B

Seniors of School B, 77 students of both sexes, expressed attitudes toward themselves and their school which correlated at acceptable levels of significance for 6 of the 9 items, favoring themselves over their schools in 4 of the 6 as indicated:

1) Useful-Useless (favoring school over self)
2) Pleasant-Unpleasant (favoring self over school)
3) Beneficial-Harmful (favoring self over school)
4) Good-Bad(favoring school over self)
5) Fair-Unfair (favoring self over school)
6) Easy-Difficult (favoring self over school)

Those not correlating at a significant level were (with the direction of tendency suggested by difference in mean scores):

1) Interesting-Boring (favoring self over school)
2) Rewarding-Unrewarding (favoring school over self)
3) Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory (favoring school over self)

School C

Seniors of School C, 123 boys and girls, expressed attitudes toward themselves and their school which correlated at acceptable levels of significance for 4 of the 9 items, favoring the self over school in 3 of the 4 as indicated:

1) Useful-Useless (favoring self over school)
2) Good-Bad (favoring self over school)
3) Rewarding-Unrewarding (favoring school over self)
4) Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory (favoring self over school)

Those not correlating at a significant level were, as indicated below, all favoring self over school, on the basis of mean scores:

1) Pleasant-Unpleasant (favoring self over school)
2) Beneficial-Harmful (favoring self over school)
3) Interesting-Boring (favoring self over school)
4) Fair-Unfair (favoring self over school)
5) Easy-Difficult (favoring self over school)

School D

Seniors of School D, 68 students of both sexes, expressed attitudes toward themselves and their school which correlated at acceptable levels of significance for 5 of the 9 items, favoring self in 3 of the 5 as indicated:

1) Useful-Useless (favoring school over self)
2) Beneficial-Harmful (favoring school over self)
3) Fair-Unfair (favoring self over school)
4) Easy-Difficult (favoring self over school)
5) Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory (favoring self over school)

Those not correlating at a significant level were (with direction of tendency suggested by differences in mean scores):

1) Pleasant-Unpleasant (favoring self over school)
2) Good-Bad (favoring school over self)
3) Interesting-Boring (favoring self over school)
4) Rewarding-Unrewarding (favoring school over self)

Summary

One clear tendency appears in the study, one supportive of the general theory of relationships of self-perception to a person's perception of his world: He who thinks well of himself tends to think well of others and things. Both boys and girls who liked themselves also liked their schools; those who disliked themselves likewise disliked their schools.

An additional tendency emerged, though not so clearly: Boys particularly demonstrated a preference for themselves above their schools in the total scores. While the girls did not do so at an acceptable level of confidence, their mean scores also favored themselves; and both sexes tended to score themselves more highly than their schools on separate items of the scale, with some exceptions.

Boys did not see themselves as being more useful, good, or rewarding then their schools. They saw their schools as significantly more beneficial than themselves.

The girls saw their schools as significantly more useful, beneficial, and rewarding than themselves.

Although the pattern exhibited in Table 3 cannot be regarded as significantly indicative of how the senior students of each school tended to view themselves and their schools, the fact that the figures tend to be supportive of those interpreting the total of all four groups suggests

that there is some validity in them. Students in only one, School C, failed to place the self (in terms of mean scores) above school in a majority of the categories. Note that one, School D, rated self higher in all but one category.

Note, however, that in all four schools the students viewed their schools as being more rewarding. All four groups viewed themselves, however, as being more pleasant, interesting, fair, and easy.

The semantic differential scale is meant to measure over-all attitude as being favorable-to or opposed-to the subject being evaluated. The pairs of words selected are meant to stimulate a general response, rather than a particular one. The examination of separate items was done in this study only in the hope that some clues might emerge as to what the school might do to modify the views of students toward improving the learning environment. Whatever may be concluded is certainly, at best, meager--though the scales may have evoked a more honest (or naive) response than would have been obtained by simple questions about what was good or bad about the school (or the self).

The schools are reported separately so as to leave the interpretations of the vagaries (or tendencies) in the different groups to the reader.

Questions still remain:

Do students view the school as comparatively unpleasant, uninteresting, unfair, and difficult? Note that, with the mid-point of the scale for each item being "4," both boys and girls rated their schools <u>below</u> that mid-point on each of these items, when the mid-point is expected to represent <u>neutrality</u> or <u>indifference</u>. Furthermore, in

each instance those ratings were significantly (at $\leq .05$ level) below the students' average ratings of themselves on the same items. In fact, in no instance did they rate themselves below "4"; also, they rated the schools above "4" on all other items.

Perhaps the reports from the separate schools will provide the basis for critical analyses of what their particular schools mean to students.

A Basic Question Unanswered

How high is high? How low is low? What should the students have scored? What is a "healthy" estimate of one's self and one's school? Does a "realistic" average person perceive himself as above average ("4") or below--or just average? Will seeing himself critically drive him to improve, or will a more positive self-image encourage him to achieve more? We know that no word means the same thing to two people--nor the same in different cultures. We know, also, that both individuals and cultures vary in their willingness to compliment themselves, or be critical of themselves or things. Does a mean score of "4" in one culture mean the same in another culture?

Do the students really have such a high regard for themselves and their schools?--for mean scores for both sexes, and for both self and school, fell well above the mid-point of "36" in the total score range of 9 to 63? Or is the language of the scale such that only comparative scores have meaning?

Really, we do not know. We would hope that the enthusiasm of youth has produced an optimism that the schools, as well as the home and

community, give general support. Despite the slight but clear and recurrent tendency for students to rate themselves above their schools, the general tendency to rate both as high is gratifying. Perhaps their tendency to rate themselves a bit above their schools indicates that the schools are doing well--for the youngster who does not "outgrow" his home and school is not maturing in one sense.

But we have no comparable data. We do have a sampling of 382 responses regarding self on this scale from a random sampling of 12-through-20-year-olds drawn from several counties in the Breathitt-Perry County area--taken for another study. The responses from this group, who in general were younger, produced figures clearly "in the ball park" of being the same, a mean of 46.40 compared to the 49.04 and 48.27 found for the high school seniors.

Do young people become more critical and perhaps cynical or more open and optimistic about themselves and their world as they get older? The matter would appear to deserve some study.

A final question might be: How can the school honestly raise the self-perceptions of its students--not give them foolish illusions about themselves but the kind of self-confidence that generates aspiration and effective initiative and drive? Perhaps some introspection by the staff of each school, in light of the responses by their own students to the separate items of the scale, may lead to approaches that would cause students to respect themselves more.

It does appear as a clear probability that if the school raises the student's respect for himself it thereby raises the student's respect for his school.

--Paul Street, Director
Terrence Leigh
Ronald Ward